

THE CHANGING IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT OF POST-SOVIET GEORGIA IN 2004-2012*

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1. Introduction

The Rose Revolution in 2003 marks the beginning of Georgian politics that strongly promote the roadmap to Europe as the only available means of developing the country. This political direction was taken by President Saakashvili and the United National Movement (UNM) government in order to overcome the legacy of the Soviet past and to transform Georgia according to European standards. It was not an easy decision for a country which was generally considered as belonging to the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Such a bold and provocative choice between Russia and Europe meant a number of unintended consequences for Georgia, which culminated in a war with Russia in 2008.

Why could Georgia's European project, which initially aimed for peaceful coexistence with Russia, lead to the allocation of a role of the chief antagonist to the northern neighbour? In contrast to most literature on this topic, this paper finds that Georgia's initial program of peaceful coexistence with Russia entailed a skilful tactics of inclusion and exclusion of Russia into/from the European project. These state-driven politics foresaw an exclusion of Moscow from domestic affairs and an engagement of it as a partner in foreign policy initiatives. This approach collapsed in 2008 due to miscalculations and mistakes resulting in the transformation of Russia into the primary enemy of the country¹.

* This paper is part of the PhD dissertation. This is also a slightly revised and updated version of a paper that has first been published in *L'Europe en formation* 385 (2018): 26-36. The paper covers the period of 2004-2012. President Saakashvili and the UNM government both took office in 2004, but in autumn 2012, the UNM government was replaced by a Georgian Dream government. Even if President Saakashvili remained in office until autumn 2013, he lost control over the Parliament and thus was not in full control over legislative and executive anymore and thus his discourse lost validity.

1 Within the framework of this research 464 speeches by President Saakashvili are analyzed which were provided by the Saakashvili's Presidential Library. Relevant parts of the speeches were located by typing in a search engine key words such as 'Russia', 'Kremlin', 'Europe', 'EU', 'integration'.

2. European project as a roadmap for the development of Georgia

Georgia's European project is not a new initiative. The country has always leaned towards Europe as a roadmap for development, but due to the Soviet occupation, the European alternative was never tangible. After independence, relations between Georgia and the European Union (EU) were taken up, but now post-soviet Georgia seemed distant, uninteresting and even dangerous to engage in for the EU. The recognition of Georgia's independence by the European Community on March 23, 1992 marked the start of a political dialogue, which was followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations on December 21, 1992.² Another significant milestone in EU-Georgian relations was the adaptation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1996, which was also extended to other South Caucasian countries.³

The relationship intensified only after the Rose Revolution in 2003 – the UNM government decided to bring Georgia back to Europe. President Saakashvili openly stated that Georgians “are and should remain a nation united in our historical destiny to join the European family of democratic nations, the family we should never have been separated from, our family.”⁴ For this end, the President, together with the UNM government, hegemonized the European project as the only political agenda for internal and external development of the country. In response, the EU “appointed a Special Representative for the South Caucasus, launched a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission, and employed the Commission's Rapid

2 European Commission, *EU-Georgia Relations*, (European Commission Press Release Database), accessed July 24 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-95-11_en.htm#PR_metaPressRelease_bottom.

3 Ibid.

4 Mikheil Saakashvili, “Address by the President of Georgia at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, September 25, 2013), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

Reaction Mechanism to support post “Rose Revolution” democratization processes.”⁵ This approximation strategy was followed by the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and by the Eastern Partnership in 2009.

The European project is not based on a single document, but on various agreements, initiatives, reports, recommendations, programs, instruments etc., which have been initiated and institutionalized over time. From the Georgian perspective, the goal of these documents was the closest possible political association and the greatest possible economic integration with the EU, which could only be achieved through the consolidation of the Georgian state based on liberal democratic principles. These documents regulated relations both between the EU and Georgia, within Georgia and—to a certain degree—Georgia’s relation to the rest of the world.

The project had a foreign policy component, such as “the joining of Western-dominated international or regional organisations” and the normalization component in the relations with Russia, but also an internal component, namely “to modernise Georgia to bring it up to the level of the West.”⁶ These two components were tightly intertwined, as progress in European integration required the modernization of the country. Hence, the project was directed towards handling almost all internal issues such as corruption, institutional problems, budget deficit, territorial conflicts and social division – factors that were hindering the development and the EU integration of the country⁷.

5 *International Crisis Group*, “Conflict Resolution in South Caucasus: The EU’s Role,” (Europe and Central Asia), accessed July 26, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/conflict-resolution-south-caucasus-eu-s-role>.

6 Vicken Cheterian, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution: Change or Repetition? Tension between State-Building and Modernization Projects”, *Nationalities Paper* 36, no. 4 (2008): 694.

7 European Union: External Action, *EU/Georgia Action Plan*, (European External Action Service) accessed July 24 2017, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/georgia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf.

Similarly to the EU, Russia was also part of the internal and external dimension of Georgian politics: because of its role in the conflicts on Georgian territory and because of its influence on politics at the national level as a legacy of the Soviet Union. In the framework of its European project, the Georgian government not only wanted to change the balance of external powers in favour of Europe but also to diminish Russia’s influence on the internal developments by making the country’s institutions and processes more European.⁸

The UNM government was an architect, a major force and driver behind the progress towards Georgia’s transformation even though support from the European institutions also played an essential role. The success of the project was highly dependent on the commitment of Georgian authorities. Official documents and reports resulted in practical initiatives and increased the presence of Europe as a player in internal politics. This presence permeated every aspect of political, economic and social life and led to an exclusion of the Soviet legacy and, consequently, Russia as an internal actor.

Targets of exclusion politics were actors who threatened the project. Incompatibility with and hostility towards the objectives and value system of the project were the main criteria for exclusion. Even though the threats for the implementation of the European project ranged from corruption to ineffectiveness of state institutions, by 2008, Russia was proclaimed as a primary antagonist, even enemy, of the European project and of the statehood of Georgia. However, did the initial version of the project as launched in 2004 intend to exclude Russia as an actor?

8 Mikheil Saakashvili and Catherine Ashton, “Joint statements for the media” (speech, November 16, 2011), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

3. Russia as a strategic partner: 2004-2006

The European project was founded on peaceful premises. It prioritized good partnership relations with its neighbours. The government's goal was "to work cooperatively with all our partners to advance lasting security and stability."⁹ Out of all neighbours, Russia had a special status due to its influence in the region, which was de facto accepted by the international community. For the Georgian government it was clear that it had to walk a fine line between not angering Moscow and becoming a member of the European family. The task was challenging, but it was the only way for Georgia to stay in charge of its own fate.

Building good neighbourly relations with Russia meant cooperation with the Kremlin as an external partner, but not as an actor in internal politics. By that time, Russia already had a status of an antagonist and this had to be manoeuvred. In order to do that, it was important to solve two main internal issues: withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia and restoration of the territorial integrity of the country. Hence, the UNM government wanted to include Russia in two main external projects in order to be able to exclude it from the internal dimension of the politics. The role allocated to Russia was one of a strategic partner who was expected to play a positive role in the development of the country because a prosperous Georgia was of interest to the Kremlin. Saakashvili believed that "peace on its borders is a source of stability for peace in Russia itself."¹⁰ This mission was riddled with difficulties as it aimed to persuade Russia to give up on its hegemonic ambitions towards Georgia, to engage in its development and, respectively, in the project of Europe.

9 Mikheil Saakashvili, "Speech delivered by Mikheil Saakashvili at John Hopkins University" (speech, February 4, 2004), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

10 Mikheil Saakashvili, "Remarks - H.E President to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe" (speech, January 26, 2005), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

Nevertheless, Saakashvili seemed determined to follow the plan to normalize the relations with Russia.¹¹

The state as inherited by the UNM government in 2004 was fragile and had to deal with self-proclaimed regions that were supported by Russia: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Adjara and Samtskhe-Javakheti. All four had direct contacts with Russian political and military elites. The support they received from the Kremlin varied in its form, type and degree from region to region. All four, however, shared one feature: the presence of the Russian military bases and troops. Hence, in order to regulate relations with those regions, the cooperation with Russia was of key importance.

The enthusiasm among Georgian authorities was high because Russia seemed ready to cooperate by staying away from meddling into Georgian internal affairs. During the crisis in Adjara in May 2004, Russia restrained from using its military bases and personnel stationed in Gonio to support Aslan Abashidze, a local leader and close ally of Russia, when he blew off the bridges connecting the region with the rest of Georgia. Instead, the Kremlin sent the National Security Council chief, Igor Ivanov, who defused the crisis by bringing Abashidze to Russia. This way, Aslan Abashidze was manoeuvred into a peaceful ending of his thirteen-year control of Ajara in May 2004¹² by President Saakashvili. The success in Adjara, however, generated false confidence in the UNM government and the President. There was an incorrect impression that Georgia's politics of persuasion towards Russia were effective and that "through a skilful mix of threatened force and imaginative

11 Mikheil Saakashvili, "Speech delivered by Mikheil Saakashvili at John Hopkins University" (speech, February 4, 2004), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

12 International Crisis Group, "Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable Elsewhere in Georgia?," (Europe Briefing), accessed July 24 2017, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/saakashvili-s-ajara-success-repeatable-elsewhere-in-georgia.pdf>.

diplomacy”¹³, it was possible to regain control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and usher out Russia.

This wishful thinking was fuelled by another significant success of the UNM government. In 2005, Russia agreed to pull out its military bases from Georgia within a 3-year period. The Georgian government pushed this process and focused on a closure of the GRVZ headquarter (Group of Russian Troops in the Trans Caucasus) stationed in Tbilisi as well as of two military bases located in Akhalkalaki (Samtskhe-Javakheti region) and Gonio (Adjara). Georgia insisted on a regular international monitoring of the military base in Gudauta located in the breakaway region of Abkhazia¹⁴. Even though Russia reported closure of the military base in Gudauta in 2001, the Georgian Government was concerned that “[the base] had not abandoned and has continued functioning for years in violation of the international obligations undertaken by Russia.”¹⁵

In spite of many difficulties, U.S. and EU engagement on this issue¹⁶ as well as numerous meetings and negotiations at the domestic political and military level yielded a result in 2005: Russia agreed to pull out its military bases and personnel from Tbilisi, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Adjara by the end of 2007. This event was much celebrated within the country as a victory of UNM politics.¹⁷ By reaching the

agreement, the exclusion-inclusion tactics triumphed. Through dialogue and inclusion, the government managed to address one of the most crucial issues for Georgians. After two hundred years of presence, Russia finally agreed to pull out its bases and troops. This implied the elimination of leverage which the Kremlin could use to disintegrate the country further.¹⁸ President Saakashvili and his government were well aware of the importance and implications of the agreement for the country and its people.

In early 2008, Russia reinforced the withdrawal of its military bases per agreement. Unfortunately, this was a delusive achievement. This became more obvious in connection to another national goal, the resumption of the central government’s control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Summer 2004 can be regarded as the beginning of the implementation of that goal, when the fight between Georgia and Russia erupted in Tskhinvali and surrounding areas. The situation severely escalated and resulted into skirmishes between both sides, which left 27 civilians and 17 soldiers dead.¹⁹ Despite these incidents, hopes and expectations remained high that the central government would reinforce its authority over the region through politics of persuasion and inclusion.

4. Russia as an antagonist: 2006-2008

Relations between Georgia and Russia were never easy, but during the period from 2004 to 2006, the two parties managed to maintain a dialogue with each other, which led to certain improvements. The first signs of tension, which significantly damaged the relationship, were observed in the beginning of 2006. In January

13 Ibid.

14 Civil Georgia, “Moscow Comments on Gudauta Base in Abkhazia” (Civil.ge), accessed July 24 2017, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=12472>.

15 “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on the treaty on the creation of a joint military base in Gudauta signed between Russia and the so-called republic of Abkhazia,” accessed May 10 2016, http://belgium.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=595&info_id=6054.

16 Igor Torbakov, “Moscow Views Military Withdrawal Issue as Litmus Test for Georgian-Russian Relations,” *Eurasia.net*, accessed May 05, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav012804.shtml>.

17 Mikheil Saakashvili, “President Saakashvili hails” (speech, May 31, 2005), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

18 International Crisis Group, “Georgia: The Javakheti Region’s Integration Challenges (Europe Briefing),” accessed July 26, 2018, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b63-georgia-the-javakheti-region-s-integration-challenges.pdf>.

19 Mikheil Saakashvili, “The address of the President of Georgia in the David the Builder National Defense Academy” (speech, August 07, 2012), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

2006, Mozdok, a Tbilisi gas pipeline, exploded in North Ossetia, which stirred an energy crisis between Russia and Georgia. In March 2006, the Russian State Consumer Agency imposed a ban on an import of Georgian and Moldovan wines. This move was met with criticism and harsh rhetoric from the Georgian side.²⁰ In September 2006, the situation further escalated when the Georgian authorities arrested four Russian officers on espionage charges. In 2007, multiple air space violations by Russian helicopters, one of which was downed by Georgia's anti-aircraft system, were reported. Tensions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were part of daily routine in these regions. These events yielded a diplomatic crisis between the countries. In such circumstances, President Saakashvili changed his politics by focusing solely on smoothening the conflictual situation and resumption the dialogue with Russia. Although the exclusive part of the inclusion-exclusion politics dramatically increased, Saakashvili still wanted to engage with the Kremlin. Hence, despite confrontations and an embargo in 2007, he continued to praise his counterpart Vladimir Putin by calling him a "historic figure" in order to have "good-neighbourly and principled relations with Russia" as well as to maintain "improvements in Georgian-Russian relations."²¹

President Saakashvili tried to deescalate the situation through continued inclusion of Russia in negotiations and "talks formally and informally." On several occasions, he explained that the foundation of the UNM political order was not anti-Russian—it was anti-Soviet. Nevertheless, there was an apparent contradiction in his discourse because Russia as a legal successor of the Soviet Union "was

synonymous with the Soviet past, with failure, with all that Georgia wanted to leave behind [...]."²² That is the reason why, after the opening of the Occupation Museum in Tbilisi in 2006 on Independence Day of Georgia, he had to clarify that "Tbilisi museum is about Soviet, not Russian, occupation."²³

The UNM politics to ease the tensions with the Kremlin proved unavailing due to the absence of a direct conversation with Russia, which is the key to the success of diplomacy. The channels for political dialogue were closed by 2007 due to the events that unfolded in 2006. This standstill eventually culminated into open military conflict between the two countries over South Ossetia in 2008 damaging the relations and the channels of political dialogue irreversibly. As a result, the image of Russia dramatically changed; it re-emerged as a dreadful threat for Georgia, as the "Other".²⁴

The official position made a U-turn towards Russia. The northern neighbour was declared as an enemy of Georgia and its people by depicting it as an antithesis of everything that Georgia wanted to achieve since independence. Apart from Georgian sovereignty, Russia allegedly carried a threat to: 1) the progress in state building, 2) the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country and 3) the Georgian political leadership and, in particular, the President. There was a clearly defined official line of arguments, which was not very different from opinions of the expert community at home and abroad, about Russia's motivation to attack Georgia. According to the official narrative, Georgia

20 Defense Minister Okruashvili's remark was particularly non-diplomatic on April 20, 2006, when he said that "even if you export – excuse me for this expression – feces to Russia it can be sold there." After that incident the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the Georgia's Ambassador to Moscow on April 26 and expressed protest over Okruashvili's comment.

21 Mikheil Saakashvili, "Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's news conference at Tbilisi City Hall" (speech, February 23, 2007), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

22 Vicken Cheterian, "Georgia's Rose Revolution: Change or Repetition? Tension between State-Building and Modernization Projects", *Nationalities Paper* 36, no. 4 (2008): 693.

23 Mikheil Saakashvili, "Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's news conference at Tbilisi City Hall" (speech, February 23, 2007), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

24 Mikheil Saakashvili, "The address of the President of Georgia in the David the Builder National Defense Academy" (speech, August 07, 2012), archives of the Saakashvili's Presidential Library.

incarnated a successful journey of a failed state that blossomed into a “beacon of democracy” by regional standards. Saakashvili believed that “this was an ideologically dangerous project”²⁵ for Russia as it was the first time that a Caucasian country managed to transform itself into “an efficient nation State.”²⁶ Saakashvili was certain that President Putin saw the threat in Georgia’s progress because it could have a spillover effect on other countries in the region. It could inspire and mobilize other countries in the post-Soviet space to undertake the same reforms, which could result in leaving the Russian sphere of influence and “move towards Europe.”²⁷ That is the reason why Russia could not let Georgia set such a precedent. In order to avoid such a scenario in the region, Russia allegedly used all possible measures against Georgia such as “an embargo, a war, an invasion, and an occupation.”²⁸ With those hostile activities, the President claimed that Russia aimed to reverse Georgia’s progress achieved in pursuing the European project. President Saakashvili was convinced that “the reforms had to be crushed before they would bear all their fruits.”²⁹ This is the reason why—in Saakashvili’s view—Russia’s “efforts to roll back the advances of the EU and NATO in our region—progress based on the will of our people”—were becoming more intense.³⁰ Saakashvili insisted that Russia’s “objective was to stop our Euro integration”³¹ and that the Kremlin specifically targeted the architects of the European project in Georgia, the UNM government and the President. Saakashvili

used to quote Russia’s foreign minister Lavrov who had allegedly said that “the Post-Soviet Space is one big spiritual sphere, with only one anomaly—the Georgian government.”³²

5. Radicalization of the narrative: 2008-2012

The image of Russia in 2006-2012 is the complete opposite of the image created 2004-2006. A “constructive partner”³³ willing to have peace at its borders turned into “the Russian aggressor”³⁴ with “the imperial fantasies” which should be fought against—the “common struggle” for the “we.” If in 2006, the official narrative associated Russia neither with occupation nor with the Soviet Union, this was reversed in 2008. Russia was repositioned from a strategic partner to an antagonist who did nothing but threaten the statehood of Georgia and, most importantly, hinder the realization of the European project and the plan for the European future. For Georgia, Russia became a “constitutive outside,” the enemy of the European project, which could not be included in it because the very essence of Russia signified an opposition to the European idea. The Kremlin evolved into a culprit responsible for almost all misfortunes of the country because of its alleged goal to regain influence over post-Soviet countries.³⁵

After the war in 2008, all channels of direct

25 Mikheil Saakashvili, “Address by the President of Georgia at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, September 25, 2013), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Mikheil Saakashvili, “The address of the President of Georgia in the David the Builder National Defense Academy”, (speech, August 07, 2012) archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

32 Mikheil Saakashvili, “Georgian Democratic Transformation: A Test Case for the Post-Soviet World at the Princeton University” (lecture, May 18, 2012), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

33 Mikheil Saakashvili “Remarks - H.E President to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe” (speech, January 26, 2005), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

34 Mikheil Saakashvili, “The address of the President of Georgia in the David the Builder National Defense Academy” (speech, August 07, 2012), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

35 Mikheil Saakashvili, “Address by the President of Georgia at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, September 25, 2013), archives of the Saakashvili’s Presidential Library.

contact between Georgia and Russia were shut down. Georgian politics zeroed in on blaming and shaming of the Kremlin for the continued aggression and for the disrespect of the international order. The UNM government was concerned by the “creeping occupation” of Georgian territories in the vicinity of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which proceeded through the process of “borderization.” In other words, Russia was grabbing the territories without staging a war by fixing the fences and thus demarcating additional Georgian territories for itself. Due to such circumstances, the narrative became rather radical and unfiltered at times. “Saakashvili is said to have mocked Mr Putin as ‘Lili-Putin’ as a reference to his height.”³⁶ This allegation was never confirmed, but its existence indicated that there was no chance for the resumption of a dialogue between the two presidents. Aggravated tension and mutual antagonism was now the defining feature of the relations between Georgia and Russia, whereas politics of Europeanization served not as a remedy, but as an instigator of tensions.

By 2012, the image of Russia was at an all-time low in Georgia. Even though there had been an ongoing debate on the detrimental role of Russia in Georgian state building since the independence of the country, it was the first time that the Georgian government officially declared Russia to be “a state exercising military occupation”³⁷ of Georgian territories by adopting a law on “Occupied Territories” on October 23, 2008.³⁸ Russia was proclaimed the number-one-enemy of Georgia and the Georgian people at the political level.

36 Clifford. J. Levy, “The Georgian and Putin: A Hate Story,” *The New York Times*, accessed July 26, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/19/weekinreview/19levy.html?mcubz=3>.

37 Mikheil Saakashvili, “Georgian Law on ‘Occupied Territories,’” October 23, 2008, <https://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2015/03/Law-Occupied-Territories-English.pdf>.

38 Ibid.

6. Conclusion

President Saakashvili and his government put a lot of trust in the politics of transformation of “the enemy” into “a partner” for the purpose of building a new reality. Even though the President managed to achieve some successes, his efforts to address territorial problems failed. Instead of restoring territorial control over breakaway regimes in 2008, Georgia lost more territories to Russia within these regions.

The failure of the inclusion-exclusion politics towards Russia strongly affected Georgia’s European project. It was a mistake to believe that it was possible to include Russia into the European project while at the same time aiming to exclude it from Georgia’s internal politics. For the Georgian government, the European project and Russia proved to be two irreconcilable alternatives that could not co-exist.

The success in fighting corruption and Soviet legacy, one of the main priorities of the European project, negatively affected the relations with the Kremlin. Such turn of the events affected the initial status of “a strategic partner” allocated to Russia because the UNM government decided to prioritize the continued implementation of the European project over establishing good neighbourly relations with Russia. Due to the failure to reconcile the priorities of the European project, the Georgian government failed to transform Russia into “a partner.” It could not convince the Kremlin that Georgia’s Europeanization was not a threat to it. Thus, instead of bringing peace and stability to the country, the UNM’s choice for Europe aggravated the tensions between Georgia and Russia. This resulted in the re-emergence and subsequent institutionalization of Russia as an enemy of European Georgia and of the “we” community, as is most strongly expressed in the law on “Occupied Territories.”

Even though Saakashvili’s inclusion-exclusion politics failed, there is no alternative to a

continued implementation of the state-driven European project for Georgia if it intends to grow into a full-fledged liberal democratic state. Being European means efficient state institutions, effective democratic governance, and respect for liberal values. The control over the breakaway regions is essential, but concessions in the European project are not a guarantee for the territorial integrity of Georgia. The long history of less than perfect relations with Russia shows that for an independent and pro-European Georgia there cannot be ideal politics that might appease Russia. None of the Georgian presidents/leaders and governments has happened to be “suitable” for the Kremlin, neither the “balanced” and “cautious” Eduard Shevardnadze—a representative of the soviet *nomenklatura*—nor the “cooperative” and “pro-engagement” Georgian Dream government led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire who accumulated his fortune in Russia. The problems and challenges in relations with Russia will always be a part of Georgian reality unless the Kremlin starts accepting Georgia as an independent state or/and Georgia ceases to pursue its declared pro-European aspiration. The recent string of events, which started unfolding on June 20 after the Russian member of Parliament Gavrilov took the Parliamentary Chairman’s seat allegedly without a prior approval from the Georgian side, has clearly shown that the Kremlin still lives in Soviet reality when it could threaten and punish a country from its “sphere of influence” for its alternative political views, preferences and choices.

Therefore, there are lessons to be learned from history for current and future Georgian governments: 1. Do not take the independence of Georgia for granted because Russia’s ambition to claim Georgia back has not ceded yet; 2. Avoid romanticizing Russia in order to not end up being lured back in the Soviet-style union with Russia; 3. Increase the presence of the EU and the US at the domestic level in order

to avoid being left alone with Russia; 4. Tackle the Kremlin’s provocations through a robust information campaign at the international level; 5. Do not give in on the obstacles created by the Kremlin; 6. Ensure continued hegemony of the European project through principled and coherent Europeanization of each and every sector and area in the country; and 7. Seek membership in European institutions through taking concrete measures toward this end.

Unfortunately, this will not bring back the occupied territories, but it will at least ensure peace and independence of Georgia. The inclusion-exclusion politics have not been effective in solving the Russian issue, but they have proved efficient in making progress in the country towards the approximation to the European standards. Therefore, further elaboration and regular re-adjustment of the inclusion-exclusion politics in line with the current situation in the country and its cautious implementation should ensure progress and prosperity in Georgia in the long run.

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